

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Palo Alto October 1, 1999

Thank you very much. I am delighted to be here in this beautiful home and this beautiful tent. I think I should tell you Eric and Wendy and their daughters have opened their home to us; they have also opened their swimming pool to us. We're on top of the swimming pool; I say that not to make you nervous—[*laughter*]—because we all know that this is a community where technology reigns supreme. There will be no failure of the technology here.

You might be interested to know that the White House press room, where you sometimes see me answering questions at briefings, that's also on a swimming pool. The President used to have a swimming pool there. And when President Nixon got in, he thought that he should do something for the press and give them closer access to the White House, so he covered up the swimming pool and gave it to the press, which resulted in his getting a lot of really good press as a result of that great and generous gesture. [*Laughter*] I said that because I always like to see the reporters laugh, and they're over there. [*Laughter*]

I am delighted to be here. I thank Joe Andrew and Beth Dozoretz and Governor and Mrs. Romer and all the people from the Democrat Party for being here. I'm glad Congresswoman Anna Eshoo got home. I don't know when she got back, but they have been voting like crazy for a long time. I want to thank John and Ann Doerr and Sandy Robertson and Scott Cook for their help on this event tonight, as well.

Let me say, what we're going to do tonight is what I prefer to do, which is after we have dinner, we're just going to have a little conversation. And so I won't speak very long. I want to thank Eric for what he said. I have tried to be a good President, to support the growth and opportunities of this community, although it is not true that I'm not technologically challenged; I am. But I understand a lot of things I can't do. Most of you do, too. So I try to understand well enough to be a good President, and I've had an enormous amount of help from the Vice President, from others, and from many people here.

I think that a lot of people in this community who have been working with us since 1991 would genuinely be surprised at how very much influence and input you have had in the decisions that we've tried to make for America over the last 7 years. And you've also had very articulate voices speaking up for you, including Anna Eshoo, Zoe Lofgren, Ellen Tauscher, and others, and I thank them all.

The other thing that I would like to say is that I am very grateful for the opportunity I've had to serve as President, to have a chance to help to give you the chance, and people like you all over America the chance to do all the marvelous things which have occurred in the last 6½ years. I especially feel that way about the technology community which represents—the high tech community represents about—directly; not indirectly, but directly—about 8 percent of our economy, but 30 percent of our growth since 1993. And it's something that you can be very proud of.

So what I tried to do for this community—I also was very mindful—was something we were doing for all of America, that it would benefit all of America, that it would lift our country and broaden the horizons and possibilities of the future for our children.

The last point I would like to make is this, and I hope we can talk more about it inside. The central issue for the American people as citizens, as we head into a new election season, and the first one in a long, long time I haven't been a direct part of, is not whether we will vote for change, but what kind of change we want to embrace.

You know here, as well as any group of people in America, that avoiding change is not an option; if we all do nothing, we're going to change because the way we work and live and relate to each other and the rest of the world is changing at a breathtaking pace. So the question is, what deliberate decisions will we make about the nature of change that we hope to shape and we hope to grasp?

The argument I've been trying to make to the American people, I think with some success, to the Democrats in Congress with some success and to the Republicans in Congress with more

limited success, is that we ought to identify the largest challenges facing our country that we now are in a position to grasp because of our current prosperity and the projected financial lines that we see in the future.

The biggest ones I believe are, number one, the demographic challenge caused by the retirement of the baby boomers. We have to lengthen the life of the Social Security Trust Fund, as well as to make it easier for people to have more private savings so that when people my age and younger retire, the baby boomers, we don't bankrupt our kids and undermine their ability to raise our grandkids. Number two—and that requires not only Social Security but some changes in Medicare as well.

Number two, we have to deal with the education of the most diverse and the largest group of schoolchildren in our history. Eric told you that he was at the education summit that the Governors had, the second one over the last 4 years. It was the 10th anniversary of the first education summit we had at the University of Virginia when I represented the Democratic Governors and President Bush was in office, and we set goals.

And then we argued that there ought to be standards to achieve those goals, and now, when I became President, only 16 States, led by Governor Romer, who was the leader of the Governors on education, had really enforceable standards; now, 50 do—in 4 years. That's good. Only 11 States had real accountability for schools and teachers and students. Now we still only have 16. So the next big thing we've got to do is get more charter schools out there, more options, and then assist them where you end social promotion, but give kids the support they need. And you have to turn around failing schools or shut them down, but there are options like charter schools if the schools aren't working. That's the next big frontier there, but that's very important.

The third big challenge I think we face is the global environmental challenge. Many of you in this room work on technologies which demonstrate to you every day that modern developments have broken the link between economic growth and putting more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. But a lot of people don't believe that.

A House subcommittee last year made us spend something like \$400,000 trying to defend our position on global warming, which was not

taxes, not regulation; it was markets and tax incentives to basically accelerate the development and the widespread use of available technologies that would grow the economy while improving the environment. And they think it's some dark conspiracy to take us back to the stone age economy. And we see this all over the world, and it will be a terrible problem for our children unless we do something about it.

There's a new book out by Paul Hawken and Amory and Hunter Lovins, and it's called "Natural Capitalism," that I commend to all of you. No one could read it and come away with any conclusion other than we could actually accelerate the growth of this economy if we got very serious about energy conservation and the development of alternative energy sources. We would accelerate, not slow down, the growth of the economy. So it's a huge issue, I think.

The fourth thing that I would like to say is I think that we have got to find a way to sustain—to keep pushing the limits of the business cycle. When I became President, I was told by my own economists that if we got the unemployment rate below 6 percent for 6 months or more, we'd have inflation. And it's been below 4½ percent for 2 years, and we don't have much. I don't think we've repealed all the laws of economics here. I don't even think you can do that. But what we have done is to plug into the global economy and emerging technologies in a way that make it possible to fundamentally change the parameters of business cycles and the heavens of supply and demand. In order to do that, what I think we have to do among other things, in Government, is to keep paying down the debt.

And I've given the Congress a proposal that, if they would adopt it, would deal with these other challenges I've mentioned, provide for a modest tax cut and still enable us to get America out of debt by 2015 for the first time since 1835. And I think it would be very good economics, because with interest rates set by global markets to have in America a situation where the Government wasn't competing with you for money, and we were going to have lower interest rates for a generation, in my judgment would lead to higher standards of living, more business growth, more jobs, and a more stable future.

So I think this idea of paying down the debt, which sounds like a very old idea in the context of the global economy, is actually a new one.

There are a few of you here in this room that are almost as old as I am, and anybody who is—certainly anybody who is 40 or over who went to college and took any number of economics courses, was taught by people that we ought to have a healthy amount of debt; every country needed a certain amount of debt because you were always borrowing to invest in the future.

Then, in the 12 years before I took office, we borrowed just to put food on the table as a government, which was a disaster. We may need to do that again someday. But right now, in this global economy, we'd be better off getting out of debt.

The last point I want to make is this is something you should all ponder—no it's not, it's the next to the last point I want to make is—[laughter]—not everybody has participated in this economic growth. Yes, we've got the lowest poverty rate in 20 years, the lowest African-American poverty rate ever recorded, the lowest Hispanic poverty rate in 20 years, and I'm proud of all that. But there is a huge number of working people and their children in poverty and skirting on the edges. They have not participated in this recovery, and we just have to face that. Even though unemployment is the lowest it's been in 29 years. And a lot of them are physically isolated in inner cities and the Delta of the Mississippi River and Appalachia and Indian reservations. Technology can have a lot to do with how we overcome that. But we have got to find a way to bring enterprise to poor people, because the distribution of intelligence in this country is fairly even. We have to figure out a way to make the distribution of usable opportunity even enough to get a core of enterprise in these poor areas here and around the world.

This really is the last point. One of the most ironic experiences I have had as President is

that I have been privileged to work with you and others to build a truly modern economy for America, an economy for the 21st century. But so much of my personal leadership in foreign and domestic policy has been required to deal with the emotional and practical and national security demands caused by the eruption of primitive hatreds, from Bosnia to the Middle East to Northern Ireland to African tribal warfare to the Oklahoma City bombing to this whole spate of the ethnic and racial and religious and antigay violence we've had in America in the last 2 years.

It's quite interesting, isn't it? I mean, here you are out here; all you think about is the new millennium. You just gave me a book about the these hard questions to ask about the next thousand years. Isn't it ironic that the thing that's holding us back most in fulfilling our shared potential is our inability to form a community around our common humanity because of our vulnerability to mankind's most ancient fears: the fear of the other? And so I think we need to deal with that.

I'm very proud that I believe my party is on the right side of all those issues, and I thank you for being here to help us tonight.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:35 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Eric and Wendy Schmidt; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair, and former Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, former general chair, Democratic National Committee; Mr. Romer's wife, Bea; attorney John Doerr and his wife, Ann; Sandford Robertson, founder and chair, Banc Robertson Stephens; and Scott Cook, founder and director, Intuit, Inc.

The President's Radio Address *October 2, 1999*

Good morning. Although my voice has been a little hoarse, I want to speak with you this morning about your voice, about how you can make the difference this week to help secure

the vital health care protections you've long deserved.

Like many of you, I've been appalled by the tragic stories of men and women fighting for their lives, and at the same time forced to fight